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Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

POUCH: BUCHAREST, DACCA, JAKARTA, KATHMANDU, KUALA LUMPUR,
PHONOM PENH, SEOUL, SINGAPORE, VIENTIANE, WELLINGTON

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
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SUBJECT: FIRST QUARTER POLITICAL ASSESSMENT FOR CHINA--INTERNAL
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SUMMARY. THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS UNDERWAY IN CHINA'S INTERNAL SITUATION AND THIS ASSESSMENT AIMS AT PROVIDING A HONG KONG VIEW OF EVENTS AND THEIR PRESENT COURSE. NO ATTEMPT IS MADE TO ACCOMMODATE OTHER PERSPECTIVES WHICH THE DEPARTMENT IS IN A BETTER POSITION TO JUDGE. THE SALIENT FEATURE IN OUR VIEW IS THAT A NEW ROUND IN THE REGIME'S POWER STRUGGLE IS UNDERWAY WITH THE IMPETUS ORIGINATING FROM THE LEFT. NAMES OF LEADERS UNDER ATTACK ARE SURFACING. CHIANG CHING HAS A LEADING ROLE IN GUIDING THE MOVEMENT AS SHE DID IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. THE STRUGGLE POSES DIFFICULTIES FOR CHOU EN-LAI AND HE WILL HAVE TO MAKE ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE COURSE OF EVENTS. NO ONE APPEARS TO WANT THE MOVEMENT TO BECOME DISORDERLY, BUT THERE IS SOME SLIPPAGE CONCEALED BEHIND RESTRICTIONS ON INTERNAL TRAVEL. END SUMMARY.

1. THE POLITICAL MOVEMENT WITHIN CHINA HAS DEVELOPED RAPIDLY BUT ABOUT AS EXPECTED AND THERE IS NO DOUBT NOW THAT ANOTHER EPISODE IN THE REGIME'S LONG STANDING POWER STRUGGLE IS AFOOT. THE OSTENSIBLY EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO CRITICIZE LIN PIAO AND CONFUCIUS IS INCREASINGLY TRANSPARENT, AND THE FOCUS OF DEBATE IS NARROWING DOWN TO CRITICISM OF PRESENT LEADERS WHO ARE BEING ACCUSED OF DEVIATING FORM MAO'S LINE SINE THE FALL OF LIN IN 1971. THE END OF THE EPISODE IS NOT IN SIGHT AND A REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS SUGGESTS THAT THE OUTCOME IS NOT DECIDED.

2. THE LEFTIST RESURGENCE, WHICH FIRST EMERGED IN EARLY 1973 WITH A DEFENSIVE ASSERTION THAT THE FALLEN LIN SHOULD BE BRANDED AN ULTRA-RIGHTIST AND NOT AN ULTRA-LEFTIST, AND THEN WENT ON TO TAKE THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST BACKSLIDING FROM THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, TURNED INTO A MASS MOVEMENT IN FEBRUARY. THE CADRE HAD BEEN WARNED IN ADVANCE; AT THE PARTY CONGRESS THE PRECEDING AUGUST CHOU EN-LAI HAD SPOKEN AT LENGTH OF STRUGGLE TO COME AND ADVISED CADRE TO MAKE MENTAL PREPARATIONS FOR IT. AT THE SAME TIME THE YOUNG LEFTIST FIGURE WANG HUNG-WEN CALLED FOR PULBIC CRITICISM. THE MASS PHASE WAS LAUNCHED IN A PEOPLE'S DAILY EIDITORIAL MILITANTLY LABELED THE UNDERTAKING A "REVOLUTION" INITIATED AND LED BY MAO PERSONALLY.

3. THERE WAS PROMPT NATION-WIDE REACTION BUT IT WAS GENERALLY LIMITED TO SUPERFICIAL DISPLAYS OF CONDITIONED RESPONSES LEARNED IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. MASS RALLIES WERE HELD, POSTERS PUT CONFIDENTIAL

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UP, AND MADIA WAS BLANKETED WITH THE MESSAGE THAT THE PERNICIOUS INFLUENCE OF LIN AND CONFUCIUS WAS TO BE ROOTED OUT. THE CONDUCT OF THE CAMPAIGN IS INTENDED TO BE DISCIPLINED AND UNDER PARTY CONTROL AND THIS WAS DEMONSTRATED WHEN INSTANCES OF FACTIONAL CLASHES AND MANIC BEHAVIOR INEVITABLY CROPPED UP. UNRULY BEHAVIOR HAS BEEN QUASHED OR CONTAINED AND ISOLATED. AN ANTIC RESPONSE BY YOUTH DEMANDING TO BE RELEASED FROM ELITIST ASSIGNMENTS AT UNIVERSITIES WAS QUICKLY DISCOURAGED. A SECOND EDITORIAL,

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ON FEBRUARY 20, TEMPERED MILITANCY WITH AN ADMONITION TO KEEP THE MOVEMENT ON THE TRACK AND NOT ALLOW ITS DIFFUSION INTO QUARRELS OVER "PARTICULAR QUESTION."

4. HOWEVER, THIS DETERMINATION TO KEEP THINGS UNDER CONTROL HAS MET WITH SLIPPAGE WHICH THE REGIME CONCEALS BY RESTRICTING INTERNAL TRAVEL. PREMIER CHOU SPOKE OUT ON FEBRUARY 24 TO ASSURE FOREIGNERS THAT THE MOVEMENT WAS A POSITIVE INTERNAL AFFAIR NOT AFFECTING FOREIGN RELATIONS. FOREIGN OBSERVERS HAVE BEEN CHIDED FOR MAKING OBSERVATIONS TO THE CONTRARY. WHERE THIS COVERUP COULD BE PENETRATED BY MEDIA ANALYSIS, INTELLIGENCE, AND CHANCE OBSERVATIONS BY TRAVELERS, THERE HAS BEEN A CORRELATION OF INDICATIONS POINTING TO VERBAL ATTACKS ON INDIVIDUAL LEADERS AND TO FACTIONAL TENSION.

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5. THE REGIME ACKNOWLEDGED THAT INDIVIDUALS WERE UNDER CRITICISM WHEN IT ISSUED A THIRD EDITORIAL MARCH 15. CERTAIN COMRADES, IT SAID, HAD COMMITTED "SERIOUS MISTAKES." THE EDITORIAL CALLED FOR HELPING THE ERRANT MEND THEIR WAYS BUT THIS IS A FAMILIAR PRESCRIPTION THAT HAS NOT ALWAYS PRECLUDED VIOLENT OUTCOMES IN THE PAST. ACCORDING TO THE REGIME'S OWN ACCOUNT MAO PERSISTED TO THE END IN TRYING TO "SAVE" LIN. AND THERE IS LESS REASON TODAY TO EXPECT AN EASY AND TAME RESOLUTION OF THE CURRENT EPISODE
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OF STRUGGLE. MAO IS WELL INTO HIS DECLINE, CHOU IS AGING AND IN AN EXPOSED POSITION, AND THERE IS A GENERATION OF YOUNGER LEADERS PRESSING AND CONTENDING TO TAKE OVER.

6. WHILE THESE CONTENDERS MAY CONCENTRATE ON THE RIVALRY AMONG THEMSELVES, CHOU IS NOT OUTSIDE THE FRAY AND HE IS UNLIKELY TO BE GRANTED EASY ASCENSION TO MAO'S EXALTED POSITION AS ARBITER ABOVE IT ALL. ON THE CONTRARY, THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE POSITS A PRESUMPTION THAT HE IS VIEWED AS AN ANTAGONIST BY SOME OF THE FORCES BEHIND THE MOVEMENT. WE HAVE SEEN ONLY ONE REPORT OF CHOU BEING ATTACKED BY NAME AND WE DO NOT BELIVE THERE PRESENTLY IS EVIDENCE TO PROVE THAT HE IS THE TARGET OF THE MOVEMENT. HOWEVER, THERE IS A LOGIC IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH POINTS TO HIM. THE RECORD OF THE PAST THREE YEARS IS BEING CRITICIZED, AND CHOU'S PROMINENCE IN THE LEADERSHIP DURING THAT PERIOD, FOLLOWING THE FALL OF LIN, CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED. AS WE SAID ON THE EVE OF THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT IN 1972 THE MARK OF CHOU'S HAND ON DOMESTIC AS WELL AS FOREIGN POLICY WAS INCREASINGLY EVIDENT AT THAT TIME (1972 HONG KONG 902). IT SHOULD BE ASSUMED, THEREFORE, THAT CHOU COULD FIND HIMSELF IN DIFFICULT STRAITS AND BE OBLIGED TO DEFEND THE POLICIES UNDER ATTACK OR TO DISASSOCIATE HIMSELF FROM THEM.

7. THAT CHOU IS IDENTIFIED WITH MODERATION AND HAS CRITICS ON THE LEFT IS LONG ESTABLISHED CONVENTIONAL WISDOM AND IS SUPPORTED BY CURRENT INTELLIGENCE AND OTHER INDICATIONS. THE CHINESE LEADER MOST OFTEN AND CONSISTENTLY IDENTIFIED AS CHOU'S ANTAGONIST IS CHIANG CHING, MAO'S WIFE AND A LEFTIST AGITATOR. SHE PLAYED A GUIDING ROLE IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, WHILE CHOU FOR A TIME WAS A TARGET AND UNDER PRESSURE. CHIANG REPEATEDLY DENIED THAT SHE WAS OUT TO GET HIM, BUT SUSPICION TO THE CONTRARY PERSISTS AMONG CHINESE AS WELL AS FOREIGN OBSERVERS.

8. IN RECENT WEEKS THERE HAS BEEN COMPELLING REASON TO BELIEVE

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THAT CHIANG IS PLAYING A LEADING ROLE IN THE PRESENT MOVEMENT. SECRET DOCUMENTS, POSTERS, AND REFLECTIONS OF HER PROMINENCE IN MEDIA ALL ATTEST TO THIS. SHE IDENTIFIES CLOSELY WITH THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND HAS A PERSONAL INTEREST IN VINDICATING AND SECURING ITS ACHIEVEMENTS. MOREOVER, SHE APPEARED TO COME UNDER CRITICISM LAST YEAR FOR HER EXTREMISM AND SHE WAS NOT PROMOTED TO THE POLITBURO'S STANDING COMMITTEE LAST AUGUST. THIS CONFIDENTIAL

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COULD GIVE HER ADDED, RECENT MOTIVES TO FIGHT FOR HER POLITICAL LIFE. IT COULD BE HER LAST CHANCE: IT HAS BEEN ASSUMED SHE WOULD LOSE MUCH OF HER POLITICAL INFLUENCE WHEN MAO DIES.

9. TENG HSIAO-PING, THE REHABILITATED NUMBER TWO VICTIM OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, IS ON HIS WAY UP AS AN ALTERNATE TO CHOU IN PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF PREMIER, AND HE MAY HAVE AN IMPORTANT VOIVE WITH THE MILITARY. THERE HAS BEEN APPRECIABLE DISAGREEMENT--ACRIMONIOU DEBATE AND EXTENDED NEGOTIATIONS, AS INR HAS PUT IT-OVER TENG'S RETURN TO THE TOP LEADERSHIP RANKS. THERE APPERS TO BE NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN HIM AND THE LEFTISTS, AND TENG'S BELATED ELEVATION TO THE POLITBURO MONTHS AFTER THE CONGRESS LAST YEAR REQUIRED MAO'S PERSONAL INTERCESSION. HOW TENG RELATES TO CHOU IS NOT CLEAR, ALTHOUGH CHOU PLAYED A ROLE IN BRINGING TENG BACK AND THEY CURRENTLY APPEAR TO BE WORKING TOGETHER.

10. TO THE EXTENT WE CAN IDENTIFY HIGH-LEVEL LEADERS PRESENTLY UNDER ATTACK THEY ARE NOT LEFTISTS. LEAVING CHOU ASIDE, TWO CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEN WHO ARE MILITARY FIGURES IN IMPORTANT POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY OUTSIDE PEKING ARE BEING ATTACKED BY NAME IN POSTERS. THEY WERE ASSOCIATED WITH SUPPRESSION OF FACTIONS IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION. MOVING UPWARD, POLITBURO MEMBER HSU SHIH-YU HAS COME UNDER SOME CRITICISM FROM CHIANG; HE IS ALSO A MILITARY MAN KNOWN FOR SUPPRESSING REVOLUTIN. ANOTHER POLITBURO MEMBER, PEKING MUNICIPAL CHIEF WU TEH, MAY BE UNDER A CLOUD BECAUSE OF CHIANG'S ATTACK ON REVISIONIST THEATRICAL WORKS WHICH FALL WITHIN HIS RESPONSIBILITY AS HEAD OF THE STATE COUNCIL'S CULTURAL GROUP. TWO LEADING INTELLECTUALS IN TROUBLE, KUO MO-JO AND CHOU PEI-YUAN, HAVE BEEN BOWLED OVER BY LEFTISTS BEFORE; THEY ARE OF INTEREST BECAUSE OF SOME EVIDENCE THAT THEY WORKED WITH CHOU ON RECENT PRAGMATIC REFORMS.

1. THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE TO THE PICTURE SEEN FROM HERE. THE LEFTISTS LOOK TO HAVE SUBSTANTIAL STRENGTH AT THE CENTER, WITH THE POLITBURO ROUGHLY DIVIDED BETWEEN THOSE WHO GAINED POWER IN THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THOSE WHO SURVIVED IT. HOWEVER, THE LEFT IS WEAK OUTSIDE PEKING. CHOU IS POPULAR, CHIANG IS NOT. NEITHER DOES REVOLUTION SEEM POPULAR WITH THE MASSES AT THIS TIME AND EVEN THE ACTIVIST IS PROBABLY SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE MOVEMENT. THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION AND THE LIN AFFAIR TOOK THEIR TOLL IN DISILLUSIONMENT AND CYNICISM; THE PUBLIC HAS SEEMED TO

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ENJOY RELAXATION AND BACKSLIDING. THE MOST SPONTANEOUS MOVEMENT
WE HAVE SEEN WAS LAST YEAR'S POPULAR RESISTANCE TO THE YOUTH-TO-
THE-COUNTRYSIDE PROGRAM, BU IT IS NOT CLEAR HOW THE LEFTISTS
COULD TAP THIS FORCE. AT PRESENT THE PROGRAM IS MOVING AHEAD
AGAIN AND POTENTIALLY REBELLIOUS YOUTH ARE BEING SENT OUT OF THE
URBAN CENTERS WHERE THEY COULD MAKE MISCHIEF.

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12. THUS FAR THE MASSES SEEM UNEXCITED ABOUT THE ISSUES UNDER CRITICISM, WHICH INCLUDE MATERIAL INCENTIVES IN INDUSTRY,. PRIVATE PRODUCTION IN AGRICULTURE, INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS IN EDUCATION, ALTERNATIVES TO CHIANG'S THEATRICAL WORKS, AND WORKSHOP OF FOREIGN THINGS IN TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE. THE MASSES, HOWEVER, PROBABLY DO FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT NEW ELITISM AND A RETURN TO BUREAUCRACY, AND THEY ARE LIKELY TO SHOW MORE INTEREST IN THE ECONOMIC ISSUES IF EVENTS LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT NEW HARDSHIPS. THERE HAS BEEN SOME CONFIDENTIAL

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PLAYING AROUND WITH XENOPHOBIA AND CURRENT ACTIVITIES WHICH FOCUS ON PAST U.S. AND JAPANESE "CRIMES" AGAINST THE CHINESE PEOPLE ARE DISCONCERTING. THIS MAY BE ANOTHER INDICAION OF MASS DISINTEREST AND EFFORTS TO OVERCOME IT.

13. OUR CURRENT ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE MOVEMENT IS ENTERING A NEW PHASE IN WHICH INDIVIDUALS WILL BE MORE SHARPLY CRITICIZED AND OBLIGED TO SEEK ACCOMMODATION OR RESIST. THE BLOWS ARE FALLING HEAVIEST ON THE PROVINCES WHERE THE LEFT APPEARS TO BE STRUGGLING TO INFLUENCE LOCAL LEADERSHIP. WE WOULD EXPECT CHOU TO MAKE SOME MOVES TO COME TO TERMS WITH LEFTIST FORCES BEHIND THE CAMPAIGN, POSSIBLY SACRIFICING PEOPLE AND GIVING GROUND ON POLICY. THERE MAY BE SOME MILITARY MEN IN GOVERNMENT WHOM HE WOULD LIKE TO BE RID OF, BUT HIS CHANCES FOR REPLACING THEM WITH REHABILITATED, VERTERAN ADMINISTRATORS MAY BE DIMMER NOW. CHOU IS PROBABLY MEASURING THE LEFTISTS' STRENGHT, WATCHING FOR THEM TO OVERSTEP THEMSELVES. FOR THEIR PART, THE LEFTISTS ARE PROBABLY COMMITTED AT THIS STATE TO SHOWING WHAT THEY CAN DO; THEY WILL HAVE TO FURTHER DRAMATIZE THE MOVEMENT NATIONALLY IF THEY ARE TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM. IN DOING SO THEY WILL WISH TO AVOID FACTIONAL VIOLENCE WHICH WOULD GIVE A PRETEXT FOR MILITARY INTERVENTION.

14. IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE TO LAUNCH THE MOVEMENT WITHOUT THE MASSIVE SHIFT OF REGIONAL COMMANDERS AT THE END OF THE YEAR. IN THEIR OLD BAILIWICKS THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN TOO OBVIOUSLY TARGETS OF THE MOVEMENT BECAUSE OF THEIR SUPPRESSION OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, AND THEY WOULD HAVE HAD TO STRANGLE THE NEW CAMPAIGN AT ITS BIRTH OR FACE INEVITABLE CONFRONTATION WITH IT. THE MILITARY COMMANDERS MAY BE RELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN SPARED THAT CHOICE BUT THEY CANNOT FEEL SECURE, UPROOTED AS THEY ARE, NOW THAT SOME OF THEIR FELLOW COMMANDERS ARE UNDER ATTACK. THEY PROBABLY HAVE LITTLE SYMPATHY FOR THE MOVEMENT AND THOSE WHO ARE BEHIND IT.

15. WE CAN ONLY GUESS AT MAO'S ATTITUDE FOR HE IS NOT VISIBLY ACTIVE IN TE MOVEMENT. WE THINK HE GAVE A NOD TO THE MOVEMENT

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AT LEFTIST IMPORTUNING. WE BELIEVE HE WOULD PERSONALLY FAVOR A MORE REVOLUTIONARY ATMOSPHERE THAN HAS PREVAILED IN RECENT YEARS AND THAT HE VIEWS THE BACKSLIDING FROM THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION WITH CONCERN. HE PROBABLY FAVORS THE PROMOTION OF NEW BLOOD INTO THE LEADERSHIP. ON THE OTHER HAND WE ARE PERSUADED THAT HE
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IDENTIFIES WITH THE REHABILITATION OF SOME VETERAN CADRE, AND THAT HE WOULD OPPOSE STRUGGLE WHICH TRHREATENED STABILITY OR BASIC ORDER. HE APPEARS TO BE DEEPLY INVOLVED IN CURRENT FOREIGN POLICY, AND CHOU HAS BEEN AT PAINS TO PRESENT THE POLICY AS MAO'S INITIATIVE. (SEE SEPTEL ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS.)
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